

CLAIMS:

1. A method of interconnecting a plurality of users via a communications network, the method including the steps of:
 - 5 accepting key data from each user terminal, each of the key data being indicative of purchase of a physical token and being associated with player data;
 - validating the key data;
 - allowing each user access to an online game of skill
 - 10 running on a server and playable via the respective user terminals, and accepting gaming inputs associated with the game from the users via the respective user terminals;
 - providing gaming data to each of the user terminals, the gaming data being based on interaction between:
 - 15 gaming software;
 - the gaming inputs from the user terminals; and
 - the player data associated with the user terminals and their respective associated key data;
 - on the basis of the gaming software, determining one or
 - 20 more winners from amongst the users playing the game of skill is a winner; and
 - allocating a prize to the winner.
2. A method according to claim 1, wherein the player data
 - 25 includes characteristics data.
3. A method according to claim 2, wherein the characteristics data includes one or more of the following:
 - a player health value;
 - 30 a number of player lives;
 - a player strength;
 - a player identity;

player weaponry;
a time restriction; and/or
one or more intellectual, physical or sociological player characteristics.

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4. A method according to claim 3, wherein one or more types of characteristics data represent initial values, the initial values being updated as the user plays the game of skill.

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5. A method according to claim 3 or 4, wherein the user's access to the game of skill via the key data is controlled by reference to one or more of the types of characteristics data.

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6. A method according to claim 1, wherein the player data includes a time restriction.

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7. A method according to claim 6, wherein the time restriction includes a predetermined time, beyond which the key data is not valid for attempts to access the game.

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8. A method according to claim 6 or 7 wherein the time restriction includes a predetermined initial time period, the key data not being valid for attempts to access the game once the player has accessed the game for the initial time period.

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9. A method according to claim 8, wherein the initial time period can be extended by successful completion of a predetermined portion of the game.

10. A method according to claim 9, wherein the predetermined portion of the game includes a level or assigned task.

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11. A method according to claim 9, wherein successful completion of the predetermined portion of the game includes acquiring a predetermined score.

5 12. A method according to claim 9, wherein successful completion of the predetermined portion of the game includes attainment of a predetermined value of one or more of the following:

10 the player health value;
 the number of player lives;
 the player strength;
 the player identity;
 the player weaponry; and/or
 one or more of the intellectual, physical or sociological
15 player characteristics.

13. A method according to claim 1, wherein the prize is a cash prize.

20 14. A method according to claim 1, wherein the value of the prize is related to the number of users playing the game.

15. A method according to claim 1, wherein the physical token is a storage medium containing the key data.

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16. A method according to claim 15, wherein the storage medium is an optical, magneto-optical or solid state storage medium.

30 17. Apparatus for interconnecting a plurality of users via user terminals and a communications network, the apparatus

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including a gaming server programmed with gaming software defining a game of skill and configured to:

accept key data from each user terminal, each of the key data being indicative of purchase of a physical token and
5 being associated with player data;

validate the key data;

allow each user access to the game of skill via the respective user terminals, and accepting gaming inputs associated with the game from the users via the respective
10 user terminals;

provide gaming data to each of the user terminals, the gaming data being based on interaction between:

the gaming software;

the gaming inputs from the user terminals; and

15 the player data associated with the user terminals and their respective associated key data;

on the basis of the gaming software, determine one or more winners from amongst the users playing the game of skill is a winner; and

20 allocate a prize to the winner.

18. Apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the player data includes characteristics data.

25 19. Apparatus according to claim 18, wherein the characteristics data includes one or more of the following:

a player health value;

a number of player lives;

a player strength;

30 a player identity;

player weaponry;

a time restriction; and/or

one or more intellectual, physical or sociological player characteristics.

20. Apparatus according to claim 19, wherein one or more
5 types of characteristics data represent initial values, the
gaming server being configured to update the initial values as
the users play the game of skill.

21. Apparatus according to claim 19, wherein the gaming
10 server controls the users' access to the game of skill via the
key data with reference to one or more of the types of
characteristics data.

22. Apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the player data
15 includes a time restriction.

23. Apparatus to claim 20, wherein the time restriction includes a predetermined time, beyond which the key data is not valid for attempts to access the game.

24. Apparatus according to claim 22, wherein the time restriction includes a predetermined initial time period, the key data not being valid for attempts to access the game once the player has accessed the game for the initial time period.

25. Apparatus according to claim 24, wherein the initial time period can be extended by successful completion of a predetermined portion of the game.

26. Apparatus according to claim 25, wherein the predetermined portion of the game includes a level or assigned task.

27. Apparatus according to claim 25, wherein successful completion of the predetermined portion of the game includes acquiring a predetermined score.

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28. Apparatus according to claim 25, wherein successful completion of the predetermined portion of the game includes attainment of a predetermined value of one or more of the following:

- 10 the player health value;
 the number of player lives;
 the player strength;
 the player identity;
 the player weaponry; and/or
15 one or more of the intellectual, physical or sociological
player characteristics.

29. Apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the prize is a cash prize.

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30. Apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the value of the prize is related to the number of users playing the game.

31. Apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the physical
25 token is a storage medium containing the key data.

32. Apparatus according to claim 31, wherein the storage medium is an optical, magneto-optical or solid state storage medium.

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36. A method according to claim 35, wherein the gaming data sent to each of the computer terminals is customised for the user of that computer terminal.

5 37. A method according to any one of claims 33 to 36, wherein the memory also includes quantitative value data indicative of a value of the card.

38. A method according to claim 37, wherein the quantitative
10 value data is reduced in the event that a user loses the game.

39. A method according to claim 38, wherein the quantitative
value data is increased in the event that a user wins the
game.

15 40. A method according to claim 38 or 39, wherein the quantitative value data is stored on the server, and not amended in the memory of the physical token.

20 41. A method according to any one of claim 37 to 40, wherein the access to playing the game on the server is limited on a time basis.

42. A method according to claim 41, wherein the time is a
25 preset period commencing from the first time the key data is validated in the server.

43. A method according to claim 41, wherein the time is a
predetermined date.

30 44. A method according to claim 41, wherein the quantitative value data incorporates the time data.

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45. A method according to claim 44, wherein the prize includes an option to extend the original time during which the key data allows access to the game on the server.

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46. A method according to claim 37, wherein the access to playing the game on the server is limited on a credit basis.

47. A method according to claim 46, wherein the token bears an initial credit value that is attributed to the user upon validation

48. A method according to claim 46, wherein the access to playing the game is prevented once the credits reach a predetermined upper or lower level.

49. A method according to claim 46, wherein the quantitative value data incorporates the credit data.

50. A method according to claim 34, wherein the prize includes an option to increase the number of credits.

51. A method according to claim 41, wherein the game is won upon completing a predetermined portion of the game or acquiring a predetermined score.

52. A method according to claim 33, wherein the prize is a cash prize.

53. A method according to claim 33, wherein a value of the prize is related to the number of users playing the game.

54. A method according to claim 33, wherein the physical token is a storage medium containing the key data.

55. A method according to claim 54, wherein the storage
5 medium is an optical, magneto-optical or solid state storage medium.

56. Apparatus for enabling user access to interactive gaming
on a remote server via a computer terminal and an associated
10 communications link, in accordance with the method of claim
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